

SOFTWARE

AVANQUEST Fix-It Utilities 8 Professional

★★★★★

£30 inc VAT

From www.avanquest.com/uk

Fix-It Utilities 8 Professional is a suite of tools for maintaining your PC or diagnosing and curing problems. The clean, easily accessible interface divides the tools into those used for system protection and those dedicated to system maintenance. Protection focuses on virus and spyware detection, with background and user-initiated virus scanners and spyware-detection utilities that can perform Quick, Thorough and Registry scans.

Tools in the maintenance section are divided into Diagnose, Fix & Maintain, Optimize, Cleanup and Recovery. Many of these, such as StartupCommander, RegistryEditor and the included disk defragmenter, are similar to utilities available in Windows. Others, such as ClockSync (which keeps a system clock's time accurate) are of minimal use. The Registry tools, however, make it easy to fix, clean and defragment the Registry. This can often lead to improved performance, particularly if you have installed and uninstalled a lot of applications. The disk cleaner makes it easy to get rid of unnecessary files. However, you should check exactly what will be removed, as the scope of the initial search is very wide.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Useful Registry tools
- ✓ Very easy to use
- ✗ Some tools built into Windows

MAINTENANCE SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 or later, 64MB RAM, 40MB disk space
DETAILS www.avanquest.com/uk



▲ This suite includes plenty of useful utilities for maintaining and fixing common PC problems

You can set recovery points that allow you to return your computer to a previous configuration. These are not as comprehensive as dedicated backup tools, though. To guard against serious system malfunction and data loss, we'd recommend a separate backup utility.

A selection of one-click fixes are provided, each with a friendly, non-technical name. These run pre-configured routines drawn from the tool set, enabling you to keep your system in a healthy condition even if you have little technical knowledge.

Fix-It Utilities 8 Professional is a useful suite of tools for the general maintenance of your computer, and is particularly handy for the novice user. While some of the components are similar to existing Windows utilities, there are just enough extras to justify the price.

David McKinnon

FAQ

Q What's the cheapest way to get a copy of Office 2007?

A Microsoft has recently released an affordable version of Office 2007 for non-business use. For just £79 including VAT from www.amazon.co.uk, you can buy the Home and Student Edition, which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote (an application for organising notes and important information).

Better still, the price includes three licences, so you can install and use the applications on three PCs or laptops. This means each copy costs just over £26, which is a real bargain.

Jim Martin

Deputy Editor

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MAGIX Mufin MusicFinder base

★★★★★

Free

From www.mufin.com

Mufin MusicFinder is music-playback software that claims to know what you want to listen to before you do. It analyses the musical content of your MP3 collection and tries to construct playlists in a similar mood. This 'base' version is free, and we can see no reason to opt for the £15 version, which adds barely any extra features.

We doubt that a computer algorithm exists that can measure the amount of anger, joy or existential despair in a track, but Mufin's playlist generator is doing something right. Analysis took about 10 hours for our 10,000-track library, but this needed doing only once. We then specified a Dizzee Rascal track to start the playlist, and the software picked out Missy Elliot, Eminem, Pharell Williams, Busta Rhymes and a sample-heavy Beck song – we can't imagine a more consistent playlist. Starting with Tom Waits, it selected Björk, Bat for Lashes, Antony and the Johnsons, an Elvis ballad and a mellow Black Sabbath track. It was sometimes a little too efficient, playing different versions of the same song next to each other, while other attempts were less coherent. An aggressive R'n'B track from N*E*R*D followed by the Scooby Doo theme tune was

SUMMARY

- ✓ Automatic playlists a novelty
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Free

MUSIC-PLAYER SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 90MB disk space
DETAILS www.magix.com/uk



▲ Mufin tries to create a playlist to match your mood

particularly unfortunate, although on reflection, there was a certain bizarre similarity.

Mufin is simple and straightforward to use. Music is arranged by artist, album, year, genre or playlist, and browsing is extremely quick. CDs can be imported in any of eight formats, and playlists burnt to audio CD or transferred to MP3 players. Tracks with incomplete ID tags are cross-referenced against the Audioid online database, which uses the audio to identify artist, title and album information. Magix's weakness for bafflingly complex dialog boxes and right-click menus is kept to a minimum, though there are a couple of exceptions.

iTunes and Windows Media Player integrate better with online content, include video support and are more polished in places, but Mufin's simplicity, good format support and intriguing playlist generator are an appealing combination.

Ben Pitt

MR SITE Takeaway Website Pro

★★★★★

£99 inc VAT

From www.mrsite.com

Mr Site's Takeaway Website Pro is similar to the web-hosting packages we reviewed in last month's *Software Labs*. The difference is that you pay £99 upfront for a year's subscription. This works out at a relatively expensive £8.25 per month, but you do get to choose a .com domain and the price includes unlimited bandwidth, so you won't have to pay extra or face your site being shut down if a high number of visitors use up your monthly quota.

We reviewed the original Mr Site a year ago (*What's New*, *Shopper* 230) and were impressed by how simple it made the process of registering and designing a website. This new version is aimed at small businesses that don't currently have a web presence, or already have an eBay shop and want to expand and sell products from their own site.

Mr Site's shop facilities are PayPal-based, just like eBay, so you'll need a PayPal account to sell items. Customers can pay using a credit or debit card and don't need to sign up to PayPal. The shop allows you to add items quickly, with multiple images, and will take care of stock control and shipping charges.

Compared to the standard Takeaway Website, the Pro version has 600MB of web space rather than 150MB, 50 email addresses instead of 20 and a maximum of 99 pages as opposed to 50. However, these figures are nothing to shout about when compared to certain web-hosting packages. For example, eUKhost's Gold (reviewed in *Labs*, *Shopper* 242), costs £4.60 per month and includes 5GB of space, unlimited email accounts and also an unlimited number of subdomains, which can be considered as separate websites. With Mr Site, you can make only one website.

There are other features that make Website Pro's price worth it, including a facility to boost your site's prominence on search engines such as Google. This ensures that pages are correctly categorised; you simply need to enter primary and secondary categories for each page. You can automatically upload your site map to Google, too, and this also helps to push it up the rankings. Some companies charge hundreds of pounds for this search engine optimisation.

Site creation and administration is done via the Mr Site Control Panel (at www.mrsite.com). Here you can add new pages, enter content,

SUMMARY

- ✓ Unlimited bandwidth
- ✓ Very simple to use
- ✗ Limited layouts; no subdomains

WEBSITE-CREATION SOFTWARE
Requires Internet Explorer 6 or later, Firefox 1.5 or later, Safari 2 or later, dial-up internet or faster
DETAILS www.mrsite.com



▲ Mr Site's Control Panel is simple to use and lets you create a website in minutes

personalise the way it looks and even view statistics, such as how many visitors you've had and when they visited.

You can even create your own business cards and letterheads and add extra features such as blogs, photo or video galleries, user polls and mailing lists. While Mr Site won't put any adverts on your site, you can use Google AdSense to let companies place relevant adverts on your pages. You might even make back the monthly fee this way.

Most of the preset site templates are uninspiring and you can't change the basic layout. Overall, though, it couldn't be easier to create a clean-looking website from scratch.

Takeaway Website Pro is great value if you're looking to give your small business a big online presence. It's easy to use and includes everything you need to get a professional-looking site up and running. If you don't plan to sell anything and you don't need to boost your Google rankings, you should opt for the standard version, which costs just £35 for the first year.

Jim Martin

Also consider...

OPENOFFICE OpenOffice.org 2.1

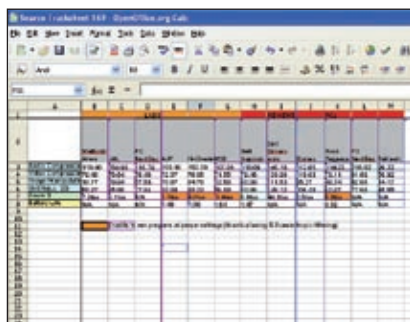
★★★★★

Free

From www.openoffice.org

OpenOffice is a completely free office suite, and it's brilliant. It might feel a little old-fashioned next to Microsoft Office's flashy features, but it has a number of excellent applications including a word processor, spreadsheet, database and presentation program. It's an essential piece of software for any PC owner.

OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 or later, Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 800MB disk space
DETAILS www.openoffice.org
FULL REVIEW Sep 2007



ADOBE Creative Suite 3 Design Premium

★★★★★

£1,576 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk

Adobe's Creative Suite has quickly become the best bundle of creative software around. With its new Design Premium, it's got even better. The bundle includes InDesign, Photoshop Extended, Illustrator, Acrobat Professional, Flash Pro and Dreamweaver – everything you need, whether you're creating work for print or the web.

CREATIVE SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP SP2/Vista, 512MB RAM
PRODUCT CODE 29500009
DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk FULL REVIEW Aug 2007



ADOBE Photoshop Lightroom 1.0

★★★★★

£189 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

Adobe's Lightroom is everything a digital camera enthusiast could want. It helps manage your images, process RAW files, correct colour, retouch and export to a range of media. It's brilliant to use and, although designed for professional photographers, a great choice for anyone with an expensive camera.

IMAGE-MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP/Vista, Pentium 4 processor, 768MB RAM, 1GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 19250102 DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Jul 2007



STUDIOLINE Photo Classic 3 Plus

★★★★

£48 inc VAT

From www.studioline.biz

Photo Classic 3 Plus is a photo-management program in the same vein as Adobe Photoshop Lightroom (see 'Also consider...' on page 53). Its image-editing tools are restricted to colour correction and a few basic creative effects, but they're offered alongside various features to manage large photo collections, such as sorting, keyword tagging and searching, web gallery creation, printing and backup. There's support for a range of Raw image formats, plus the ability to view and sort by photo EXIF data such as shutter speed and flash setting, which digital cameras embed into files.

Fast operation is crucial when working with a database of tens of thousands of photos, so we're glad to see Photo Classic Plus is quick to import images, catalogue their data and sort by complex search criteria. It's possible to find all photos with a particular keyword, an ISO speed below 400, and excluding those taken with a particular camera. The results often appear in a fraction of a second. The advanced search dialog box is jargon-heavy, but applying and searching by ratings and keywords only is also possible via a simpler, dedicated panel. Having to hold down Shift when selecting a keyword for

it to have any effect seems confusing, though. A timeline view is great for finding photos based on a yearly or monthly calendar, although it's annoying that search results always default to Thumbnail View rather than our preferred Detail View.

The Image Toolbox includes some powerful colour-correction tools. Best of all, edits are applied non-destructively, leaving the original files unscathed. We're particularly pleased to see colour curve editing, a feature that's rarely included in low-cost software and is missing from Lightroom. However, in general the tone controls aren't as sophisticated or as effective as Lightroom's. Frustratingly, there are no on/off switches for individual filters, and it took us ages to work out how to permanently remove a filter from a photo.

Web galleries look attractive without being too fussy. The software can upload them to a website via FTP, and 100MB of online gallery space is available after registering the software. Uploads are easy, but the only way to delete a gallery from the server is to delete it from your



▲ Photo Classic's colour-correction tools go way beyond what most photo-management software offers

SUMMARY

- ✓ Plenty of impressive features
- ✓ Works with web gallery photos
- ✗ Interface clumsy in places

IMAGE-MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE
Requires Windows Me/2000/XP/Vista,
800MHz processor, 256MB RAM,
150MB disk space
DETAILS www.studioline.biz

computer. Still, this is a significant advantage over Lightroom, which doesn't include any online hosting. Printing options are the weakest part of the software, with just a few (mostly useless) templates and an awkward system for customising them and creating your own.

Photo Classic 3 Plus has all the features we would hope for, but its execution is often clumsy. Text-heavy pop-up boxes tend to get in the way, various features take a while to get to grips with and there are a few rough edges to the resulting output. Photoshop Lightroom is more polished and its colour-correction tools more effective. However, it's more expensive, too, and Photo Classic was discounted to £24 as we went to press. Still, we'd download the 30-day demo to see if you can live with its quirks before buying.

Ben Pitt

Also consider...

ROXIO Easy Media Creator Suite 10

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT

From www.kikatek.com

BEST BUY This suite comes with almost all the media-editing tools you'll ever need. Its greatest strengths are its tight integration between all the modules and its friendly, task-oriented interface. With the recent drop in price, it's now even better value and it's the best media suite you can buy.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP or Vista, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM (1.6GHz, 512MB for Vista), 3.2GB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 048068411
DETAILS www.roxio.co.uk **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2008



KASPERSKY Internet Security 7.0

★★★★★

£43 inc VAT

From www.kaspersky.com

BEST BUY With a clear interface and superb anti-virus protection, the latest version of Kaspersky's Internet Security is great value. It deflected every web exploit we threw at it, and its firewall is so discreet we had to double-check it was running. There's excellent spam filtering, instant messaging integration and various tools for cleaning up after an infection. Watch for special deals on Kaspersky's website if you don't want to spend this much.

INTERNET SECURITY SUITE Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 800MHz processor, 512MB RAM, 50MB disk space
DETAILS www.kaspersky.com **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2008



RS AUDIALS Radiotracker 4.0 Platinum

★★★★★

£21 inc VAT

From <http://shop.audials.com>

BEST BUY Want to build your music collection for just £21? Radiotracker lets you legally record automatically from internet radio stations. Just choose from a variety of genres, or enter specific artists or tracks. Radiotracker will then ensure that, when they are played, they are transformed into MP3s on your hard disk, complete with ID3 tags.

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows Me or later, hard disk space for tracks **PRODUCT CODE** 300099362
DETAILS <http://radiotracker.com> **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2008





▲ Guitar Rig 3 is a superb plugin for your music production software

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS Guitar Rig 3

★★★★★

£219 inc VAT

From www.native-instruments.com

Guitar Rig 3 is a guitar amplifier emulator that you can use as a plugin for your existing music-production software, such as Cubase or Cakewalk. It has 12 amp models and 44 effects, plus virtual cabs and mics to give you a high degree of control over the sounds.

The user interface, which Native Instruments calls KoreSound, is clear and easy to use, with the right side of the screen displaying your virtual rack, into which you drag whichever amp, effect, or cab model you want to use. The left windows offer a choice of presets, organised into genres, which act as a good starting place.

The Guitar Rig range has always sounded impressive and the choice of new amp models shows careful consideration by Native Instruments. There's a new high-gain model, plus a couple of 1960s and 1970s British rock types, plus one based on the Fender Tweed Deluxe. For effects, you get a new wah wah, ring modulator, distortion, EQ and two delays, which bolster an already comprehensive list.

A virtual tape-deck allows you to record guitar parts and play along to them, so Guitar Rig can be used as a standalone practice or sketchpad tool. However, to use it only for this is to waste most of the program's potential.

As this is the software-only version of Guitar Rig, you'll need an interface to connect your guitar to a computer. For an extra £130, you can buy the Kontrol version with its purpose-built pedal that connects your guitar via USB. Otherwise, a standard USB interface will do the job perfectly well. There's a free downloadable demo available at www.native-instruments.com, so you can try before you buy.

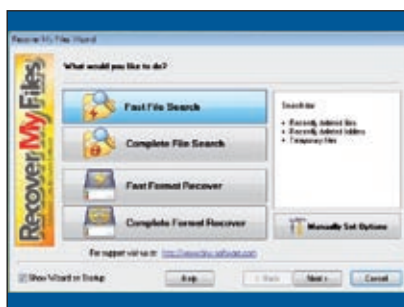
Guitar Rig 3 is a top-quality application that produces excellent results. Any guitarist with a home studio should try it immediately.

Martyn Casserly

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent-quality sounds
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Can be processor-intensive

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP (SP2)/Vista (32-bit), 1.4 GHz Pentium/Athlon XP processor, 512MB RAM
DETAILS www.native-instruments.com



▲ Accidentally formatted your hard disk? Recover My Files can help

GETDATA Recover My Files

★★★★★

£33 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk



It's inevitable that you'll accidentally delete precious files from the Recycle Bin, or face the horror of losing all the data on your hard disk because of a partitioning error or a system crash.

Fortunately, Recover My Files can restore deleted files even if the hard disk has been formatted or you've lost files through a virus infection. The software supports over 200 file types, including JPG, MP3, DOC, ZIP and MPG, and even obscure files such as saved games and internet favourites.

There's no need to have the software installed before files are lost, as you can install it afterwards. You'll need a working PC or laptop to use it, so if a system disk has been formatted, you must connect that disk to a working PC. Files can be rescued from any type of storage, including USB flash drives, floppy disks, CDs, DVDs and memory cards.

The program's main interface offers Fast and Complete searches as well as Fast and Complete Format recovery. The first two are for rescuing a small number of files (a folder of photos, for example), while the other two deal with entire drives.

We formatted a 100GB external USB hard disk and chose the Complete Format Recover option. By default, five common file types are searched for, and the program suggests you don't change these. We selected our formatted disk from the list and had to wait 12 hours for the scanning process to build an index of the files. These were displayed in a long list, along with their size, type and original folder location.

After that, we just had to select the files we wanted to restore (we selected them all) and choose the destination disk to copy them to. It's not possible to restore the files to the same disk, so make sure you have enough spare capacity before starting the process.

Given that Recover My Files rescued every file in our tests, it's well worth the price.

Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Rescues formatted files
- ✓ Restores original folder structures
- ✗ Slow; can't restore to original disk

RECOVERY SOFTWARE Requires Windows 95 or later, 128MB RAM
DETAILS www.getdata.com



▲ Inexperienced computer users will appreciate this guide's jargon-free advice

ABSOLUTE ENTERTAINMENT Windows Vista for Dummies

★★★★★

£14 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk

The *For Dummies* series of books taps into the basic human need to learn boring subjects with minimal effort. This CD follows the same ethos, and even removes the strain of holding a book in front of you. It doesn't interact with Windows at all, and functions much like an old-fashioned website with links to static pages of information. The fixed window size is quite small, but this means you can view it alongside the part of Vista you're trying to figure out.

Most of the information is presented as text with surprisingly few images, while the odd video is included to demonstrate trickier operations such as changing the firewall settings. Even so, concise article lengths and a chatty tone stop it from being too brain-numbingly dull. Articles are neatly arranged by category and subcategory, and the Search facility finds relevant articles quickly. However, searching for two words brings up any instances of either word, which isn't so useful. The only other annoyance is the voice used to announce category headings and narrate videos. It has an over-enthusiastic bark that is slightly incongruous in a friendly PC guide.

The articles are aimed squarely at beginners, covering basics such as the Recycle Bin and venturing as far as setting up a wireless router and removing spyware, but stopping short of surround sound and disk partitioning. A lot of the content isn't specific to Vista, but that's as it should be, since it's not designed for Windows XP experts migrating to Vista.

This may not be much more interactive than a book, but the content is excellent, well presented and easy to dip into. It can't always supply the answer to a problem, but its friendly, informative articles should help beginners use Vista more effectively and confidently.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Straightforward, useful information
- ✓ Accessible presentation
- ✗ Too much unnecessary shouting

REFERENCE SOFTWARE Requires Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP/Vista, 400MHz processor, 32MB RAM
PRODUCT CODE AEDWW/SEP07
DETAILS www.absolutemediaco.uk